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European traditional national minorities in Slovenian geography textbooks compared with textbooks from other European countries

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Abstract

Slovenia is a very small country with 2 million inhabitants, in a wider Europe. Accordingly, the Slovene school geography syllabus reflects a certain favorable disposition towards the treatment of European national minorities. This study, using the method of content analysis, compares the treatment of “traditional” or “old” minorities in selected Slovenian textbooks with content relating to the geography of Europe from 24 countries. There are considerable differences among the textbooks from the western and eastern parts of Europe. The latter give greater attention to traditional national minorities and use a different approach to content and instruction. The study shows that traditional national minorities are presented in more depth in Slovene textbooks than in textbooks from other European countries.

Key words: Geography textbook, National minorities, Slovene syllabus, Europe

Point of departure for the study

Europe is a continent not only of many nations as independent states, but also of numerous national minorities. In an ideal world, national minorities could serve as bridges of understanding among the various nations and states, but lack of familiarity with minorities prevents bridges of understanding developing. The denial of rights to minorities is often the result of a lack of familiarity with the issue. The first point of

departure for this study is that the reasons for this lack of familiarity differ, but their origins can be found in the educational system, and especially in the subject of geography. This subject, because of its general informative role on Europe, is most closely connected to the problem of national minorities.

There is no universally accepted definition of “national minority”. International organizations have never been able to agree on a common discourse in relation to the concept of national minorities. Generally speaking, the category in Europe includes members of a national or ethnic group whose majority is to be found in some other country. But this conceptualization is limited, since a number of minorities do not have a “home” country. Moreover, in a globalizing Europe we also encounter the consequences of mass migration. The number of immigrants from other states has in many places already exceeded the number of members of “traditional” or “autochthonous” minorities who have lived in the territory of another state for centuries. Many people in Europe think of national minorities within national states (like the Welsh minority in Great Britain or the Sorbs in Germany). In fact this connotation does not describe contemporary linguistic diversity in Europe, as they exclude the large numbers of immigrants, the new minorities who contribute to enormous changes in the linguistic public spheres of European societies (Gogolin 2002).

One approach to defining a national minority is: “A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, well defined and historically established on the territory of that state, whose members - being nationals of the state - possess ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion, or language” (Jackson Preece 1998). By defining the group as historically established, this definition removes the possibility of migrants (of any kind) being included.

Although we can find several arguments against this kind of definition of national minorities, in practice it is quite common in European countries to make a distinction between “old”, “traditional”, or “autochthonous” minorities on the one hand, and “new” minorities on the other. The term “new minorities” refers to groups created by “recent” immigration, after the Second World War (Tanase 2003). Some members of “new minorities” have already taken the citizenship of the countries to which they have immigrated and been successfully included in integration processes, while other members of “new minorities” are not yet citizens and are not yet integrated into the new society. For “traditional” minorities, in addition to the expressions “old” or “autochthonous”, we also see the expression “indigenous” minorities, but in many widely used public sources, the term indigenous minorities in Europe is reserved for those “which still maintain traditional subsistence cultures (Sámi people in Northern Scandinavia, Nenets and Komi people in Russia).” The expression “traditional” national minorities has also already entered into official use in the European Parliament, in which there is an Intergroup for Traditional National Minorities, Constitutional Regions and Regional Languages.

This research is deliberately limited in scope to only the treatment of “traditional” or “old” minorities even though it is difficult to draw a clear line between them and more recent immigrants. The reason for this delimitation is that immigrants are not

presented in textbooks in the same way as traditional minorities, and a comparative analysis is thus impossible. In our study we thus recorded Turkish people only as a traditional national minority in Bulgaria and Macedonia, where they are relatively few in number: We did not, however, record them as a new minority in, for example, Germany, where they number several million. Our study for the reasons mentioned earlier did not examine immigrant communities.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the extent to which learning about European traditional minorities is included in geography textbooks, and in what ways. This was conducted through an analysis of textbooks covering the geography of Europe, which were selected from various European countries. Here it should be noted that the geography of Europe is not taught to the same age group of pupils in the different European countries. The geography of Europe is included in geography textbooks for 6th, 7th, and 8th grade classes, in which for example the 7th grade in one country may consist of pupils in the 13/14 year-old age group, while in another country these are pupils who are 12/13 years old. It should likewise be noted that the subject of geography in some countries is integrated with history and other social sciences, and geography for some years has not been taught as an independent subject.

Attention to traditional minorities should be evident in the curriculum set by individual countries, but in fact the national curriculum is really only a set of more or less general guidelines for teachers and textbook writers, and not of precise instructions on how much and in what way to address the topic of minorities. For this reason an analysis of textbooks is probably a key indicator of the actual state of affairs in this area, although for a complete evaluation the classroom performance of teachers working with their students plays a decisive role.

The second point of departure of the study is the specific attitude of Slovenia as a state and of geography as it is taught in Slovene schools in relation to national minorities. Slovenes, whose ethnic group comprises about 2 million members, represent one of the smallest European nations, and until the emergence of an independent Slovene state in 1991, they were always some sort of minority included in a larger national structure. It is in this psychological feeling of “smallness” and “being a minority” that the main reasons for a more favorable disposition towards the problem of traditional national minorities can be found. The Slovene state enables its own two traditional or autochthonous minorities – Hungarians (numbering roughly 6500) and Italians (numbering less than 3000) – to have not only bilingual place names and a representative each in Parliament, but also primary school textbooks in the native language.

This positive approach to minorities can also be seen in geography syllabuses for the first and second levels of secondary education. Since this comparative study is restricted to the age group from 11/12 to 14/15 years, we look at the Slovene syllabus for the seventh year of Slovene primary school, when the geography of Europe is covered. The objective as stated in the general introduction of the syllabus is that the student, with the help of maps, should be able to describe the linguistic and religious diversity of Europe and draw conclusions about the consequences. In the study of Southern and Southeastern Europe, the objectives are to be able to describe, with the support of maps, the diverse national and religious composition of

Southeastern Europe and form conclusions about the consequences of political contradictions on the lives of people. In the study of Central Europe the objectives are to be able to compare the countries of Central Europe with respect to location, size, and population and with the help of a map be able to name the nations of Central Europe and identify the linguistic and religious groups they belong to. In the study of Eastern Europe pupils are expected, with the help of a map, to be able to describe the political and national composition of Eastern Europe.

The Slovene syllabus does not go into further detail and does not identify by name the minorities which need to be treated. This is left up to the authors of textbooks and, in the final analysis, of course, to teachers themselves. A more detailed picture of the treatment of minorities can thus be obtained from a survey of textbooks, which can be compared to the textbooks of other countries. Our basic premise is that geography instruction in Slovenia devotes relatively more attention to traditional minorities than it does in the majority of other European countries, but this would be very difficult to show empirically. Since in this study we could only include one textbook from each country, the results of the analysis are necessarily based only on the textbooks selected. Our working hypothesis, which can be empirically verified, is thus as follows: "The selected Slovene textbook with content relating to the geography of Europe qualitatively devotes more attention to the problem of traditional minorities than do selected textbooks with content relating to the geography of Europe from other European countries."

Methodology

Although traditional minorities are studied at different age levels, we limited our focus to geography textbooks for pupils in the age group from 11/12 to 14/15 years. The topic of minorities in European countries is covered at higher age levels, but to an even lesser extent and only in the curricula of some schools.

For the purposes of analysis we selected the textbook from each country which devoted the most content to the geography of Europe, including its traditional minorities. We analyzed textbooks from 24 countries, which are listed in the references. We did not include textbooks from the remaining countries either because they did not include a separate study of Europe or because they were written in languages with which the authors were not sufficiently familiar. For some countries we simply could not obtain any textbook.

The analysis includes traditional national minorities in all European countries with the exception of Russia. In some countries Russia is not covered in the same textbook as the other parts of Europe. Some textbooks treat Europe together with the home country, but in the majority of cases the home country is covered in another textbook. For this reason we did not include traditional national minorities which a textbook covers in the context of the home country.

In this study we used the method of content analysis, which is more broadly classified as the quantitative analysis of materials (Good & Scates 1967). The essence of this method is the quantitative measurement of the frequency of appearance of a certain category or its covariance with other categories (Hoggart, Lees & Davies 2002). In our research we counted how many times and in what way a particular traditional

national minority was mentioned in the textbooks examined. A particular minority (for example Hungarians in Romania) may not be mentioned at all in one textbook, mentioned with only one word in another, given more text in a third, presented only through a photo in a fourth textbook, and so on. For this purpose we divided the frequency of treatment of individual traditional national minorities into six categories, presented in tables.

The first category encompasses only the mention or listing of a minority in the basic text without any additional explanation or cartographic or graphic illustration. From an instructional perspective this may have little value, since it requires merely rote memorization and reproduction of facts. Of greater value is the second category, in which a minority is treated in one to two sentences. The third category is a more extensive treatment of a minority which can be several paragraphs in length. Only the third category provides knowledge sources to enhance students' knowledge of the minority. Best of all is when the minority is shown on a map (the fourth category) or in an image (the fifth category). The sixth category is the mention of a minority in graph form together with the majority nationality and other minorities.

The study and its results

The list of traditional national minorities studied expanded with a review of every new textbook. Each minority was categorized as described above as it was encountered.

Table 1 shows those traditional national minorities which are presented best to pupils. This means that they are accorded one to two sentences or more and in some instances accompanied by photographs. By far the best presented minority are the Sámi people in northern Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden and Finland), who are presented together with one or more photographs in almost half of all the textbooks analyzed. They are presented in this way primarily because of their dress and their raising of reindeer, which are an appealing topic of study to children. The list of the other best presented traditional national minorities in Table 1 indicates the political relevance of their display: usually these are minorities which are frequently reported in the media in connection with their aspirations for greater autonomy and separatism. This is true especially of the Basques in Spain and the Albanians in Serbia and Macedonia. Among the better presented minorities are also the Catalans in Spain and the Hungarians in Romania. The list of traditional national minorities in Table 1 thus in fact is a good reflection of the political relevance of such minorities in Europe, although some of the minorities which receive less coverage in the media are neglected.

Traditional national minority	mentioned only frequency	1 to 2 sentences frequency	more extensive treatment frequency	displayed on a map frequency	displayed in a picture frequency	displayed in a graph frequency
Sámi people in northern Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden and Finland)	4	1	7	3	11	1
Basques in Spain	5	1	3	2	2	0
Albanians in Serbia	3	2	2	2	1	1

Albanians in former Yugoslavia	4	1	0	1	0	0
Catalans in Spain	4	3	0	2	0	0
Albanians in Macedonia	6	1	1	1	0	0
Russians in Baltic States	2	2	0	0	0	2
Hungarians in Romania	8	1	0	1	1	1
Turks in Bulgaria	4	1	0	1	0	0
Serbs in Croatia	4	0	1	1	0	0
Poles in Belarus	4	1	0	0	0	0
Swedes in Finland	2	1	0	1	0	0
Bretons in France	1	1	0	2	0	0
Friulian people in Italy	1	1	0	2	0	0
Sardinians in Italy	1	1	0	2	0	0
Roma people in Hungary	1	1	0	0	1	0
Poles in Ukraine	1	0	1	0	1	0
Slovaks in Romania	0	1	0	0	0	0

Table 1: Didactically most suitably presented traditional national minorities

Table 2 lists traditional national minorities which are less suitably presented in instructional materials. They are merely mentioned, or occasionally displayed on a map or graph. The table shows four of the most poorly presented minorities. Among them are some which deserve greater attention (for example, Hungarians in Serbia, Russians in Ukraine, Roma people in various countries, Alsatis and Corsicans in France, and others). In addition to minorities shown in the tables, there are four minorities in the textbooks analyzed which are presented only on a map or graph (Basques in France, Russians in Ukraine, Poles and Lithuanians in Latvia).

Traditional national minority	mentioned only frequency	displayed on a map frequency	displayed on a graph frequency
Turks in Macedonia	6	1	0
Hungarians in Serbia	5	2	0
Germans in Romania	4	1	1
Slovenes in Italy, Macedonians in Bulgaria, German-speaking minority in Italy	4	1	0
Russians in Ukraine	4	0	1
Romanians in Serbia, Galicians in Spain, Franco-Provençal-speaking minority in Italy	3	1	0
Roma people in Romania	3	0	1
Russians in Estonia	2	0	2
Alsatis in France, Flemish in France	2	1	0
Russians in Lithuania	2	0	1
Croats in Serbia	2	1	0
Bosniaks in Serbia	1	2	0
Poles in Lithuania, Ukrainians in Lithuania, Finns in Sweden, Belarusians in Lithuania, Ukrainians in Estonia, Belarusians in Latvia, Russians in Latvia	1	0	2
Belarusians in Estonia, Jews in Ukraine, Ukrainians in Latvia	1	0	1

Table 2: Traditional national minorities presented only by a mention (listing) and display on a map or graph

Traditional national minority	mentioned only frequency
Albanians in Greece	6
Macedonians in Greece, Russians in Belarus	5
Turks in Greece, Hungarians in Slovakia, Hungarians in Slovenia, Croats in Slovenia, Serbs in Macedonia, Slovenes in Austria, Sorbs in Germany	4
Serbs in Slovenia, Italians in Slovenia, Hungarians in Croatia, Croats in Austria, Ukrainians in Belarus, Russians in Moldova, Ukrainians in Moldova, Bulgarians in Greece, Germans in Czech Republic, Roma people in Slovakia, Italians in Croatia	3
Poles in Czech Republic, Czechs in Slovakia, Croats in Hungary, Vlachs in Bulgaria, Roma people in Bulgaria, Croats in Romania, Vlachs in Greece, Faroese people in Denmark, Hungarians in Austria, Bosniaks in Croatia, Czechs in Austria, Roma people in former Yugoslavia, Romanians in Bulgaria, Serbs in Hungary, Slovaks in Hungary, Macedonians in Serbia, Bulgarians in Serbia, Vlachs in Macedonia, Slovenes in Hungary	2
Macedonians in Albania, Slovenes in Croatia, Czechs in Croatia, Germans in Serbia, Dutch in Germany, Danes in Germany, Jews in Belarus, Bulgarians in Moldova, Gagauz people in Moldova, Franco-Provençal-speaking minority in France, Corsicans in France, Germans in Denmark, Ladin-speaking minority in Italy, Albanians in Italy, Croats in Italy, Serbs in Romania, Turks in Romania, Ukrainians in Slovakia, Rusyns in Slovakia, Roma people in Albania, Turks in Albania, Greeks in Albania, Germans in Hungary, German-speaking minority in Slovenia, Rusyns in Serbia, Slovaks in Serbia, Ukrainians in Serbia, Serbians in Montenegro, Bosniaks in Montenegro, Albanians in Montenegro, Roma people in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jews in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romanians in Hungary	1

Table 3: Traditional national minorities presented only by a mention (listing)

If we look at how textbooks in different countries approach the topic of traditional national minorities, we are unable to identify any unified model. Besides errors in content as well as some political biases in some places, we also find considerable illogicality in the very concept of treating minorities. Thus, in some textbooks it is not possible to discern any differences between traditional minorities and new minorities (immigrants). Some traditional minority regions (for example, Wales) are given special and more detailed treatment, but the traditional minority aspect is completely missing from the discussion. In some textbooks (especially in more economically developed countries), the topic of traditional national minorities is omitted except for the case of the Balkans, where it receives some attention. In other textbooks (especially from post-communist countries) the topic of traditional national minorities in more distant parts of Europe is practically ignored, while the case of their own nationalities living as traditional minorities in neighboring countries receives detailed attention. A range of similar kinds of inconsistencies is characteristic for textbooks from other parts of Europe. In one country, which is ethnically very homogeneous, a number of traditional minorities are mentioned, while in other countries not a single one is mentioned. This finding applies especially to the listing of traditional minorities. Where the presentation of traditional minorities is more detailed, the selection of minorities is usually more balanced.

All of this is closely associated with the content and instructional approaches used by the authors of the textbooks. In this connection textbooks can be roughly divided into

two groups. The first consists of textbooks from the more economically developed countries of Western Europe which use predominantly a thematic approach to the study of Europe rather than a regional one. The topic of traditional minorities is either completely omitted (for example, in the Norwegian, Swiss, and Portuguese textbooks) or is only weakly present (for example, in the British textbook). In these textbooks more recent immigrants or new minorities tend to be given greater attention than traditional minorities. Since the majority of current minority-related problems in these countries arise from the mass immigration of the last few decades, this kind of treatment is understandable but neglects traditional minorities.

In the second group are textbooks from some of the post-communist countries which to a great extent have still preserved the old encyclopedic regional approach, with a treatment of individual countries. The encyclopedic approach attempts to show each country in all its elements of the geosphere according to the “traditional” order, following the system of the German geographer Hettner (1859-1941): geological structure, land, climate, vegetation, soil, population, settlements, agriculture, industry, and so on. This kind of approach tries to show “everything one after another”, but without going into any depth. It is typical of encyclopedias but in textbooks it is often replaced by other approaches. Textbooks which still use an encyclopedic approach list an abundance of factographic data for each country, usually also about national minorities. For each country they list an abundance of factual data, usually with respect to minorities as well, but without going into any depth. The mass listing of national minorities does not have much instructional value, though we should not completely deny the attention given to minorities. Most of the textbooks from Southeastern Europe belong in this group; the countries there have the greatest number of “foreign” national minorities within their borders as well as “domestic” national minorities in neighboring countries. Because these countries have not encountered mass immigration, they also do not devote particular attention to immigration elsewhere in Europe. The Italian textbook also belongs among those with an encyclopedic approach: it has the highest number of traditional minorities mentioned. In total there were more than 120 traditional minorities treated in all the textbooks taken together; in the Italian textbook alone, there were more than 60 mentioned.

In addition to these two fairly clearly delineated groups, there is a third group that we could speak of, in which the content and instructional approach is unclear or is a combination of the two approaches already mentioned. The textbooks from Slovenia and from Germany belong here. They use a combined regional approach which is not encyclopedic but could be termed an approach based on selected (dominant) content. It is this approach which enables the study of a smaller number of traditional minorities, but in more depth, and presented more effectively.

We can see clearly from Table 4 how much attention is devoted to traditional minorities by the selected textbooks from different countries. From the standpoint of instructional effectiveness, the most important thing is not the number of mentioned traditional minorities, but rather the manner of treatment and the greatest possible frequency in categories with a somewhat more extensive treatment and display on maps and in photographs.

If we take into account just the number of traditional minorities mentioned, these figures are highest in textbooks from Italy, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovakia. All these countries have a large number of their own minorities, and their textbooks use the encyclopedic approach. The approach taken by Slovenia's textbook, in which the number of minorities is somewhat lower, is quite different. The emphasis of this textbook is seen not in the category of traditional minorities mentioned, but in the other categories, which are more instructionally appropriate: in these the Slovene textbook is well ahead of all the others. With respect to this we can confirm our working hypothesis that the selected Slovene textbook with content on the geography of Europe, qualitatively speaking, devotes more attention to the topic of traditional minorities than the selected textbooks from other European countries.

Country of origin for the textbook	mention only frequency	1-2 sentences frequency	more extensive treatment frequency	displayed on a map frequency	displayed in a picture frequency	displayed in a graph frequency
Slovenia	4	11	8	26	5	11
Slovakia	25	5	4	1	0	1
Croatia	30	3	2	19	0	0
Serbia and Montenegro	24	5	0	0	1	0
Italy	62	2	1	2	1	0
Czech Republic	14	3	0	0	0	0
Poland	3	2	1	0	2	6
Bulgaria	6	3	0	0	1	0
Germany	0	0	3	5	1	7
Romania	34	1	1	1	1	0
Sweden	0	0	1	0	1	0
Iceland	3	0	1	0	0	0
Austria	0	1	0	2	0	2
United Kingdom	0	0	1	1	1	0
Macedonia	52	0	0	0	1	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	37	0	0	0	0	0
Moldova	1	0	0	0	0	7
Estonia	5	0	0	0	0	0
Ukraine	1	0	0	0	0	0
France	0	0	0	9	1	0
Denmark	0	0	0	0	1	0
Norway	0	0	0	0	0	0
Portugal	0	0	0	0	0	0
Switzerland	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 4: The number of traditional national minorities in an individual textbook according to six possible categories of treatment.

Conclusion

This study focused on the treatment of traditional national minorities in selected textbooks covering the geography of Europe from 24 countries. The topic of traditional national minorities in the majority of textbooks is relatively poorly elaborated compared to other topics, but there were noticeable and large differences between textbooks from the more economically developed countries of Western

Europe, which paid little or no attention to the issue, and those of the post-communist countries, which gave the topic considerably more attention. In this respect the textbook from Italy represented a major exception. The reasons for these differences should not be sought directly in the light of former political differences in Europe, but also in the use of different content and instructional approaches and the relevance of traditional national minority issues for particular countries. In the textbooks of the more economically developed countries, which have large immigrant populations, understandably enough issues relating to immigrants were given more of a focus, while in the textbooks of less economically developed countries the topic of traditional national minorities is given relatively more attention. Political frictions in the second group of countries are not connected to immigrants, which are practically unknown, but rather with the abundance of traditional national minorities. The treatment of traditional national minorities in the Slovene textbook is at least by qualitative indicators more detailed and deeper than that in the textbooks of other European countries.

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